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ABSTRACT

The Child Care Services Course (CCSC) at Red River Community College in Manitoba offers an innovative experiential learning component for the first year of a two-year diploma program. To apply for the experiential learning program (ELP), applicants must have 2 years of full-time experience in a children's center or licensed day care home working with children between 12 weeks and 6 years of age, and read at the 10th grade level or higher. Steps in obtaining credit for experiential learning include the following: (1) the student completes a college application, a reading skills test, and a portfolio detailing his/her child care experiences and accomplishments and involvement in professional associations; (2) references are contacted for an assessment of the applicant's experience and abilities; (3) the applicant is informed of the number of transfer credits granted, the competencies to be assessed through the ELP, and the measurement techniques for each competency; (4) the student receives learning modules for each required competency and completes them, often two or three at a time, in a specified order; (5) the student's prior knowledge determines how much additional time he/she must spend to complete assignments in the learning modules and prepare for mastery tests; (6) the student contacts the ELP instructor and arranges a date for testing and the submission of assignments; and (7) after the student has received credit for all of the competencies, he/she has completed the first year of the CCSC and may enroll for the second year. Benefits of the ELP include students' ability to complete the program while working full time, costs based on the number of competencies that are challenged, a self-paced format, and the adaptability to students' schedules, place of residence, and needs. (ALB)

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ASSOCIATION OF CANADIAN COMMUNITY COLLEGES CONFERENCE

RENAISSANCE '89

Regina, Saskatchewan
May 29 - 31, 1989

Presentation: The Challenge of Experiential Learning

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WHAT IS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING?

Experiential Learning is the internalized learning associated with both work and life experience. According to Dr. Alan Thomas from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (1988) - "experiential learning refers to knowledge and skills acquired through life and work experience and study which are not formally attested through an educational or professional certification"(19).
An experiential learning program is designed to give an individual the opportunity to obtain formal credit for skills and knowledge gained outside the classroom and/or through other educational programs. It is a program that gives credit for prior learning based on experience. Experiences, such as those outlined in the Experiential Learning Concept Web (See Appendix A) are recognized, ie. previous academic achievement, employment experience, family life experiences, community and volunteer work, professional memberships, self-directed learning such as hobbies, non-credit courses, workshops/conference sessions, films viewed and books read.

Recognition of these types of experiences "reduces" what a student must master in a course. Credit is awarded not simply for the experience but for the "learning" that has resulted from the experiences.

The Child Care Services Course (CCSC) at Red River Community College offers an innovative experiential learning component for the first year of the two year diploma program. The CCSC uses a competency based approach to education. In a competency based learning (ie. CBL) program the emphasis is on the mastery of identified competencies. These competencies have been identified by educators and child care professionals from the field. The competencies are grouped into skill areas and organized into a chart format called a comchart. For each competency, distinct learning modules, called compacs have been developed. Each compac contains clearly stated objectives, learning activities, resource listings and evaluation criteria. This approach to learning is very effective for the implementation of the CCS Experiential Learning Program.

HOW DOES THE CCS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROGRAM WORK?

In 1982 the Manitoba government passed the Community Child Daycare Standards Act which provided comprehensive standards for the care of young children including training requirements for child care workers (CCW's). The Child Care Services Experiential Learning Program (CCS ELP) was developed in response to this legislation, to meet the specialized training needs of CCW's who have considerable experience but little or no formal training.

In this program students obtain formal credit for the first year of the two year diploma program. Formal credit is granted in two ways.

1. A transfer of credit from subjects in the Child Care Services Course (CCSC) completed through the College's Extension division or completion of comparable subject(s) from other institutions.
2. By "challenging" competencies based on an individual assessment of "experiential learning".

To apply for the ELP program applicants must meet the following entrance requirements.

i. Two years of full time experience in a children's center or in a licensed daycare home working with children between the ages of twelve weeks to six years. Because the program is a "challenge" program prior knowledge that comes with work experience is essential.

ii. Successful completion of the prescribed Reading Skills Test (ie. Degrees of Reading Power) at a minimum grade ten level.

An individual completes a College application form and submits it with a letter outlining her work experiences with children between the ages of twelve weeks to six years. A Reading Skills Test is arranged by the Admissions Department. Once the applicant has attained the required grade ten level or better, an orientation session is scheduled to discuss the challenge process.

The applicant must complete a portfolio outline which is a file of detailed information about her experience and accomplishments. This portfolio is a very valuable tool for assessment purposes in all experiential learning programs as the data is used by the instructors to assess credit and the challenge process. It is an organized outline providing information on education (ie. post secondary) and career related continuing education such as conferences, workshops and seminars.

The applicant is also required to detail her involvement in professional child care associations/organizations, community activities related to the child care profession and any other self development or family life experience which has provided her with "learning" that is relevant to the skills and knowledge required of child care workers. This could include films viewed, books read, raising a family, community volunteer work, etc. At the orientation, it is suggested that the student review the competencies for the ELP and document experiences related to these competencies. Each applicant completes a Child Care Worker Skills Inventory by indicating how frequently (ie. daily, weekly, monthly, yearly) she does a specific child care skill.

The names of two referees who are knowledgeable of the applicant's skills as a child care worker must be included in the portfolio outline. A reference form is sent to one of the referees requesting information related directly to the competencies the applicant will be challenging. For example, a referee is asked to comment on the nature of the applicant's work in the children's center including the number and ages of children in the center, the applicant's duties, her ability to handle routines through out the day, and how she plans, initiates and guides activities for young children. Referees must also describe the applicant's ability to communicate with parents, colleagues and children and how guidance and limit setting is handled such that a child's feelings of self worth are maintained. The same Child Care Worker Skills Inventory that is completed by the applicant is completed by the referee but the degree of competency (ie. satisfactory, unsatisfactory) is measured.

Using the portfolio outline, the skills inventory and the reference the applicant is assessed to determine what and how the applicant will challenge. First, credits are granted based on subjects/courses completed in the CCSC at Manitoba community colleges and universities. Courses completed in other provinces or countries are reviewed on an individual basis and credit is granted where applicable. Of course valid transcripts must be submitted and a minimum C grade is necessary before transfer of credit is granted.

Each applicant is then assessed based on her experiential learning. All related child care experience is recognized but each applicant must be able to "prove" the learning that is associated with that experience. An applicant is not awarded complete credit for a competency on the basis of her experience, however it does affect how much work she must do in the program. A student with more experience in a particular area will have less to complete (ie. challenge) than someone who lacks "experiential learning" in that area. For example, for the competency "describes signs and symptoms of child abuse" an applicant who has attended workshops on child abuse, read articles related to this topic, viewed a child abuse film would have less work to complete than an applicant who had no related experience. Rather than having to complete two assignments and the mastery test, the applicant with all of the afore mentioned "experiential learning" would only write the mastery test. This type of "experiential" information would be outlined in the applicant's portfolio. Thus applicants are awarded "credit for prior learning" as the measurement techniques (ie. what they to do to successfully master a competency) are reduced.

Once the assessment has been completed the student is invited to attend another orientation session. After paying the challenge fee (ie. maximum of $250.00 depending on the number of skill areas a student is challenging) she is informed of the credits granted, the competencies she is required to challenge, the "order" (ie. course map) in which the competencies are to be completed as well as the measurement techniques for each competency.

The student receives the competency compacs (ie. learning packages) she is required to challenge for the first part of the course, including an "Orientation Compac". This compac outlines the terminology and format used in a compac and the best methods to use in working through a compac. The instructors review both the Orientation compac and others to ensure that the student has an understanding of how to work in the program.

The student now begins to work on the program, during her own time, by covering the material in the compacs in the order specified. The compacs are of varying lengths and this as well as the student's prior knowledge of the information, determines the amount of time spent on each compac. The student is advised to work on two or three compacs at one time, especially when the information may be more familiar to her and/or the information in two or more is closely related. Using resources (ie. books, journals, articles, AV material) from the College library and the Child Care Learning Center the student completes assignments and prepare for tests. Once the student feels confident that she has all the information necessary to meet the objectives of the compac(s), she contacts the ELP instructors and arranges a date to write tests and submit assignments. Specific evenings are set aside each month as "test nights" and one morning each week. Tests and any assignments are marked as soon as possible and official transcripts are available at a student's request.

Each student works at her own speed and there is no "deadline" as to when a student must complete the program. The most successful students work at a consistent rate. In addition to working full time in a children's center, students may have family committments and may also be attending night school.

All students accepted into the program are eligible to challenge the 250 hour practical skill component of the first year of the CCSC. They challenge the practica by demonstrating the competencies in the children's centre they are employed at, as well as the college lab facility. These competencies are evaluated by an instructor after the student has mastered a certain level of theoretical information. Those who successfully challenge the practica have demonstrated the child care skills of a student who has completed the first year of the two year training program.

Once the student has received credit for all of the competencies, she has completed the first year and may wish to enroll in the second year of the CCSC to complete the diploma program. The second year is offered on a full time basis during the day. Students must take a year away from their job and attend school. In the past, there has been some special funding (ie. Manpower assistance) for students to do this.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THE CCS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROGRAM?

There are many benefits for enrolling in a course that grants "credit for prior learning" and allows an "experiential" student to challenge part or all of the program. Some advantages are as follows.

1. The student can complete course requirements (ie. first year of a two year diploma program) while employed in a children's center, thus no loss of income.

2. The student is able to complete the course by spending minimal time at the College (e.g. she is not required to attend daily classes but comes to the College to write tests, use resources, attend workshops, etc.)

3. The student is granted a transfer of credit (with a minimum of a "C" grade) for CCSC subjects already completed through the Extension Division.

4. The cost of the total program is minimal (ie. maximum $250.00).

5. The student is able to work on the program independently and at her own individual rate.

6. The student has access to many resources at the College (ie. books, journals, AV resources).

7. A student from a rural area has easy access to all ELP resources. Arrangements are made to have the mastery tests invigilated at a convenient location for the student.

8. The student receives credit for prior learning experiences related to child care (ie. has less work to complete as receive advanced standing in the course).

9. The student receives individual assistance from instructors.

10. The student has the choice to write mastery tests on specific evenings or during the day depending on when the student's schedule allows.

11. The student has the opportunity to complete the first year in a shorter length of time than if she was to complete all subjects through the Evening/Extension divsion or the day program (ie. a "full" year).

12. The student will be better able to meet the training levels required by employers (ie. child care worker classification levels).

13. The student may use the completed portfolio outline as a valuable document when seeking employment in another children's centre.

14. The student is able to increase her chances of learning as the information is relevant and meaningful because of work experiences.

15. The student is able to practise "learning" immediately and frequently at the children's center and thus the possibility of retention is increased.

16. The student receives personalized attention and direct feedback on competencies challenged in the program.

17. The student experiences increased self-confidence as a result of recognition for prior learning.

In addition to these benefits for the student there are also advantages for the institution and the instructional staff. Some of these are as follows.

1. The institution is truly able to meet the needs of adult students who are seeking admission to courses, because their experience is recognized as credible learning.

2. The institution is able to avoid costly "retraining" of students by placing students at their appropriate level of training.

3. The institution can provide more access to courses and educational resources because of the lack of pressure on the institution's facilities.

4. Experiential learning programs can be tailored to meet the requirements of individual courses.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROGRAMS?

What are some of the implications for the future? What are the new trends for education? Over the next few years the growth in the number of "adults" wishing to enter the educational system will continue. Experiential learning programs can support adult learners in their studies by granting credit for prior learning. In all fields, "booster shots" of education and training to improve and update skills will be necessary. Experiential learning programs acknowledge education as an ongoing life long process that doesn't always take place in an academic setting.

With the costs of post secondary education "sky rocketing" experiential learning programs will continue to serve as economical and resourceful programs for both the institutions and the learners. As enrollment by part time students continues to rise, experiential learning programs can ease the burden put on both the human and physical resources of the educational institutions. Training institutions and students must, now more than ever be advocates for experiential learning. Faculty and students need to be assertive and request recognition for valuable learning gained outside of the educational system!

We would like to urge you all to consider ELP's as innovative alternatives to traditional learning programs. The benefits to society, the learning institutions and most importantly to the learners themselves are numerous and should not be ignored.

As training requirements in all fields continue to increase and more demands are put onto educational institutions to provide training programs, we suggest ELP's as a legitimate choice for the future.

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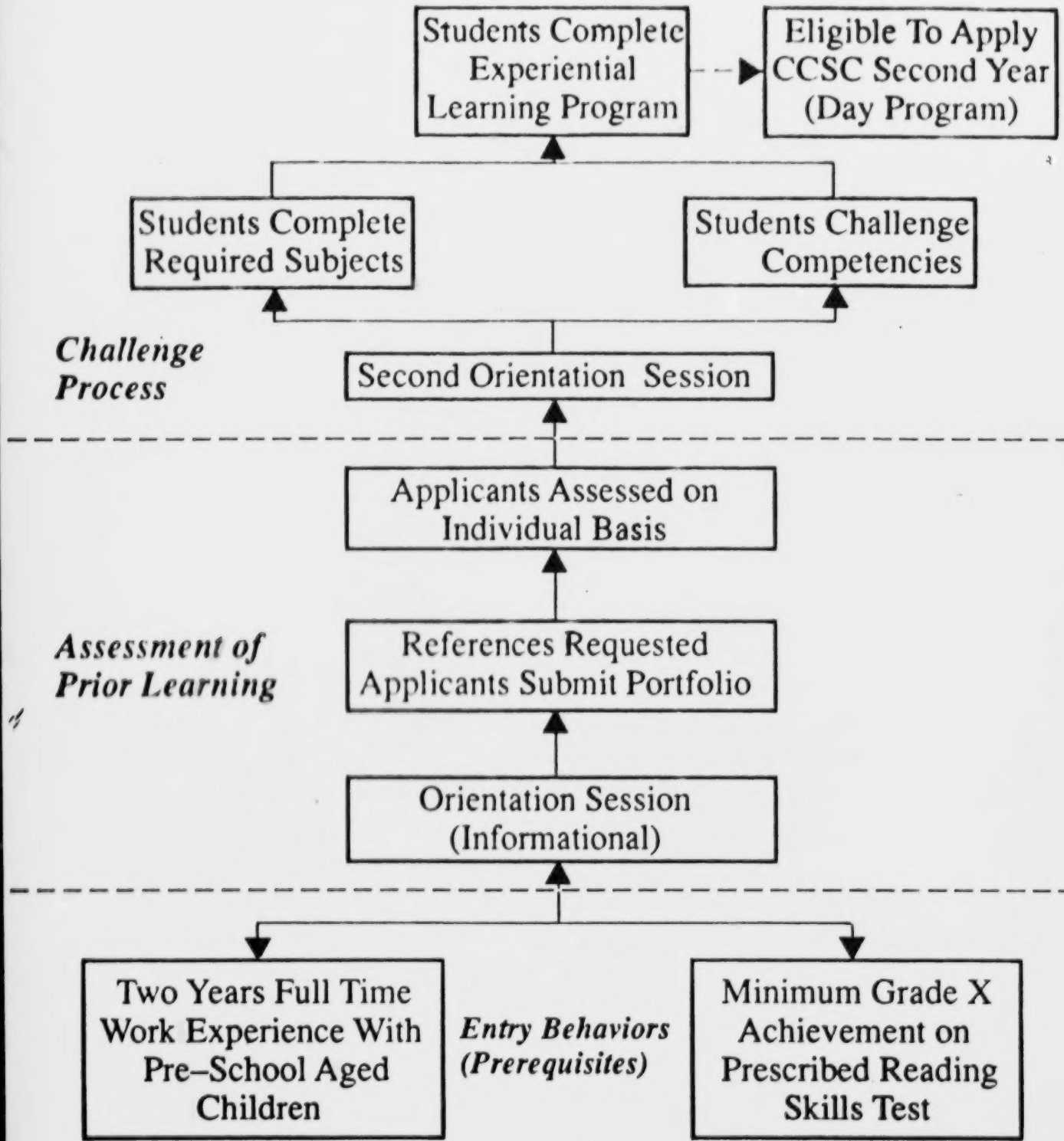
Child Care Services– Experiential Learning

Experiential Learning Program


Students Complete Experiential Learning Program
Eligible To Apply CCSC Second Year (Day Program)
Students Complete Required Subjects
Students Challenge Competencies
Challenge Process
Second Orientation Session
Applicants Assessed on Individual Basis
Assessment of Prior Learning
References Requested Applicants Submit Portfolio
Orientation Session (Informational)
Two Years Full Time Work Experience With Pre–School Aged Children
Entry Behaviors (Prerequisites)
Minimum Grade X Achievement on Prescribed Reading Skills Test

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